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Alcohol bingeing in teens spurs call to increase legal drinking age

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HEALTH experts concerned about alcohol bingeing want the legal drinking age raised from 18 to 21.

Psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg said the latest research showed one in 20 older teenagers was downing an average of 50 standard drinks a month.

"And that, to my mind, is insane - that's enough to cause measurable brain damage," Dr Carr-Gregg said.

What do you think the drinking age limit should be? Have your say below.

He said alcohol abuse cost society \$36 billion a year.

Raising the drinking age should be one of the things considered by independent MPs as they help form the next federal government, he said.

"I'm not saying no child should drink until they're 18. I'm saying the age at which people should be able to purchase alcohol from a licensed premises should be 21," he said.

"My biggest tip to parents is: don't drink copious quantities in front of your kids because, obviously, role modelling is important."

The legal drinking age in all US states is 21, and it has been raised to 20 in New Zealand.

Prof John Toumbourou, chair of health psychology at Deakin University, said there was clear evidence a higher drinking age reduced deaths and accidents by 12 per cent.

"It also reduces violence by at least the same percentage, and other alcohol-related harms," he said.

"It also reduces the age at which parents give children alcohol, because the message becomes clear that they should delay the age of introduction."

Prof Toumbourou said the change would see society become safer and more harmonious, especially for youth, and he wanted it debated.

Dr Carr-Gregg will launch the third edition of Trinity Grammar's drug and alcohol booklet, which has had a print run of 45,000 copies and has been distributed to 60 schools.

Trinity deputy headmaster Rohan Brown said that while alcohol abuse was not a problem at the Kew school, underage binge drinking was the greatest problem facing society today.

"To be able to have confidence in who you are, without needing fortification, it's super-important," he said.

"Kids so often say, 'But my friend is allowed to'. What we are trying to do, through the booklet, is say to parents: 'Be firm, be strong, be consistent'."

But school captain Rohan Barmanray said raising the drinking age could be counter-productive.

"Although kids can access alcohol really easily, it will make it like a taboo item, which makes them want to do it even more," he said.

A state government spokeswoman said there were no plans to lift the legal drinking age in Victoria.